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ABSTRACT

Something is wrong with the twelfth grade. Many principals, teachers, and students argue that the twelfth grade is unchallenging, irrelevant, and perhaps useless. Recent widespread unrest among students suggests the need to thoroughly re-evaluate the twelfth grade program in order to investigate the causes for the unrest and to suggest workable alternatives capable of alleviating the problems that plague twelfth grade programs today. This limited study has produced three conclusions regarding twelfth grade unrest: (1) the problems are both serious and widespread, (2) the complexity of the problems prevents the identification of single causes and solutions, and (3) secondary school principals are acutely aware of the need for change and for rigorous questioning of the high school program. Alternatives to the traditional high school program are being developed all across the country. While some districts are forming alternative schools and attempting major restructuring efforts, other districts are developing promising programs within the basic framework of the traditional school. (Author/JG)

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The 12th Grade:

A Critical Year

A Student's Viewpoint

By Lois Bailey

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FOREWORD

The twelfth grade, indeed, is a significant year. For some students, it is the final year of formal schooling before joining society's work force. For others, it is merely their last step in secondary school before moving into higher education.

For many students of both types, however, the senior year has become somewhat of a limbo—neither here nor there—where they feel they are placed in a holding pattern to atrophy from inactivity and lack of interest.

Educators, deeply concerned about this phenomenon, are extremely anxious to learn more about its causes and to find solutions. The twelfth grade, they reason, should be as exciting and as important in learning as the early grades.

NASSP, in its commitment to the improvement of secondary education, presents in this monograph a view of what happens in the senior year and some possible alternatives, from the perspective of a young author not far removed from the experience. Lois Bailey, a recent alumna of Williams College, does not write from an educator's point of view, but from the point of view of a student who was in high school as recently as the early 1970s.

What Lois Bailey has to say is important, primarily because it comes from one whose age level we do not often have the opportunity to hear. She is an articulate person who expresses the student's viewpoint with a clarity and a sense of balance and responsibility that is unmatched among her peers. We hope *The Twelfth Grade: A Critical Year* provides an outlook that will help you in your quest to make the last year the most vital one for every secondary school student.

Owen B. Kiernan
NASSP Executive Secretary

PREFACE

Teachers, parents, and school administrators alike feel that the twelfth grade should be critically important, both as the last step in a student's secondary school education and as the link between formal schooling and the adult world. The student must choose for himself whether to attend college, enter technical training, plunge into the competitive whirlpool of the job market, or just leave the whole question temporarily and trek off abroad for inspiration.

Yet, there is something wrong with this twelfth year. Principals, teachers, and students are now clamoring that the twelfth grade is unchallenging, boring, irrelevant, and perhaps even useless. Some have even proposed that it should be left out of the high school program. There was a time when the student was easily blamed. Dropouts, delinquents, underachievers, and other "uneducable" types alone suffered from senioritis and "copped out" by leaving school early. Only recently has widespread unrest—among the motivated and unmotivated alike—made necessary a thorough re-evaluation of the twelfth-grade program.

This monograph addresses itself to three main questions:

1. Are these problems unique to the twelfth grade and, if so, how widespread are they?
2. What has caused these problems?
3. What is being done about them, and what accounts for the apparent success or failure of these innovations?

The method used may appear undisciplined, but it does *not* pretend to be a statistical study. It represents a random and highly limited sampling of interesting and exemplary ideas and programs, and its emphasis is upon individual opinions and attitudes.

The reasons for conducting this study, limited as it is, were: First, the constraint of time ruled out the possibility of a long-range study. Secondly, the unprecedented nature of the study precluded a systematic and scientific appraisal of the problem—for the twelfth-grade "problem" as such had not as yet been defined. And, lastly, a case study of this nature has a value all its own. Because the emphasis is upon individual experience and attitudes, it can have a greater human appeal and impact than a statistical study.

While this study has not produced scientifically verifiable results and definitive conclusions, it brings to light three major trends bearing directly upon the twelfth grade:

- the extremely widespread and serious nature of the problems;
- the complexity of the problems and the impossibility of isolating single causes and solutions;
- the astounding and very promising degree of educational turmoil and change now erupting at the high school level, evident particularly in an acute awareness on the part of all principals interviewed of the need for change and rigorous self-questioning.

Principals are asking very fundamental questions that bear on both the nature of the twelfth-grade program and the entire high school program of which it is a part. These same questions must be confronted in this study:

For whom should the high school program be intended: the college-bound, technical training-bound, or job-bound student? Should each high school specialize and deal intensively with one of these groups, or should they be mixed and dealt with separately within one school? If the latter course is selected, should the twelfth-grade program promote the increasing separation of these groups? What is the value of combining these groups or separating them?

What is the high school responsible for teaching its students, and how should this bear upon the structure of the twelfth-grade program? Are any basic requirements and skills necessary for *all* students, and why? To what extent should students of different life aims and interests learn the same things, if at all?

What kind of instruction should be provided at the twelfth-grade level? To what extent should classroom learning be retained, if at all? To what extent should learning emerge into the community-at-large? Should individualized instruction be universalized, or do students need to learn together, to exchange ideas? What is the most important criterion for graduation—time spent or knowledge acquired?

How far does and should the high school's responsibility extend? Should the high school help provide a transition to the worlds of post-secondary education and the job market, or is that task up to the individual student? If a transition is necessary, what sort should be fostered?

How flexible or structured should the twelfth-grade program be in providing this transition? Should it duplicate the structure of the outside world in all its changefulness and variety, or should it—to a certain extent—insist upon the acquisition of certain common disciplines? In the face of change, what kinds of *standards* need to be maintained?

Should the twelfth grade serve the concept of a continuing education program, which would enable the individual to leave and re-enter the educational system all during his lifetime as it suits him, or should it define itself as the culmination of a "one-shot deal"?

This study will attempt to deal with these questions by examining how they have been viewed and dealt with by high school administrators—both those seeking change and those having accomplished it—and by students. It is intended especially for high school administrators who are asking themselves these kinds of questions, and who wish to consult the opinions and ideas of those who face similar problems.

My sincere acknowledgments go to the entire staff of the National Association of Secondary School Principals in Reston, Virginia, especially to Owen Kiernan for his generous sponsorship, to Thomas Koerner for his careful editing, and to Charles Baltimore and Lloyd Trump for their time and guidance; to all the high school administrators and students that took time to share their ideas with me; to all those administrators who so promptly and exhaustively responded to my questionnaire; and to my father for his invaluable advice, guidance, and wisdom.

L. Bailey

CONSIDERING THE CONUNDRUM

IS there a senior problem? Nearly 70 percent of the principals contacted during this study believe there is. In fact, most of them feel that the problem extends to many more than a few misguided individuals or chronic losers. Lack of motivation and apathy can affect many students, even those who once plunged eagerly into their studies. As one student confessed, "Senior year was my most boring and seemed a total waste. I don't think I touched one book all second semester."

Could this type of comment come as easily from the average student as from the chronic underachiever? The answer is yes. Most students contacted during this study were bright, able, eager to learn, and—what's more—eager for a challenge! Yet, the most common symptoms they displayed were a mixture of restlessness and apathy—apathy in their attitudes toward academic demands having no apparent relationship with an idealized future, and restlessness to get to that future, as uncertain as it may be.

A few strong-minded individuals insisted that the senior year could be eliminated entirely without any undue stress or subsequent adjustment problems. The dissatisfied majority stay on, aware something is wrong, yet unable to explain why it's wrong or to suggest any alternatives. For these, graduation often represents more a "getting away from" than a "going toward." The future seems as mysterious as twelfth grade is unfulfilling, but at least it symbolizes freedom and an escape from boredom.

Lack of motivation and apathy can affect many students, even those who once plunged eagerly into their studies.

With evidence that boredom, apathy, and restlessness exist among twelfth-graders, could it be concluded that senioritis is an inevitable stage, as predictable as the onset of puberty? Is it only, after all, as one principal suggested, a symptom of youth's impatience to move from the last leg of childhood to the beginning of adulthood with all its freedom? Should we therefore treat its symptoms as normal and push the problem aside as insoluble? That would imply two mistaken assumptions: first, that the causes all lie in the growing student himself; and, second, that *all* twelfth graders suffer from senioritis.

The causes are complex and by no means all internal. Some are in the very structure of the twelfth-grade program, some in the composition of the community, and some in the way in which the high school defines itself in respect to the postgraduate world.

Senioritis, while widespread, is not universal, however. Some students reported they were reluctant to leave their high schools. Some college freshmen confessed a disillusionment with "the college scene" and expressed a nostalgia for their twelfth year. One girl, pleased with her entire high school experience, seemed unable to isolate her senior year from the two preceding years. "We never considered ourselves as sophomores, juniors, or seniors," she said. "We were all too involved in the continuing process of learning and growing. My senior year, if anything, was the most fulfilling of all."

Reports like these must not be discounted. To reach the heart of the problems, the success stories must guide us, not the countless failures.*

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROBLEM

THE task would be easy if we were to accept "apathy and lack of motivation" as simple explanations for the entire senior problem. After all, of the 70 percent of those principals surveyed and reporting senior problems, all chose to characterize the problems as "apathy" or "lack of motivation" and "complaint unaccompanied by action," rather than as "violence" or "constructive action." This is an impressive statistic, but it illuminates a symptom, not a cause. Moreover, it does not indicate the diversity and complexity of the problems.

First of all, apathy and lack of motivation are only common symptoms of problems arising from very different sources. Even Nathaniel Webster, in defining apathy as "a lack of interest or concern," gives no indication of what is capable of producing such a state. Apathy has even been known to issue from contradictory causes. Inactivity, lack of challenge, or fear of the future can also produce apathy. So can an excess of work or responsibility.

Most high schools serve students of differing backgrounds, propensities, and abilities. This diversity is bound to produce differences in the types and extent of problems experienced.

An intellectually gifted, college-bound student will necessarily have different needs, concerns, and problems from those of a student who gets restless with any book and who likes to work with his hands. The underachiever and the merit scholar seek help on entirely different levels. And, finally, the student of parents having professional backgrounds, regardless of his native abilities and talents, will bring different attitudes and tools to his high school education than will a student from a non-professional background,

* See NASSP's *Mood of American Youth, 1974*, which reports the results of a national survey of high school youth.

particularly if he is a member of a minority group. A high school inheriting this complicated cross-section of young Americans cannot expect to apply a single remedy to what appears an across-the-board problem.

Yet, if the student population is carefully studied by background, propensity, and ability, certain patterns begin to emerge. First, the intellectually oriented and/or gifted, college-bound student is often apathetic because he is bored. His work lacks the element of challenge and it fails to motivate him. Being ahead of his classmates, he finds he can complete the assignments in half the allotted time, yet must suffer through the same number of class hours as the others. Moreover, the material itself is not challenging, because it is pitched at the level of the average student. Much of it he has probably acquired on his own; still he is forced to endure repetition in order to complete the requirements.

This problem is bound to reach critical proportions in the twelfth grade, a time when the excellent student has already distinguished himself and seeks fresh challenges—especially those with some resemblance to the college experience. His intellectual interests are more clearly defined by the time he reaches twelfth grade, and he becomes all the more frustrated by the general orientation of the courses. Turned off by his courses, he bides his time until graduation, his only continuing incentive to good grades being college entrance.

In the technically oriented student, apathy can indicate a fundamental lack of interest and talent in the *kinds* of things taught and in the whole classroom format. A student who likes to work with his hands and wants to acquire a technical skill finds himself out of his element in a typical school classroom. Even assuming that a certain amount of classroom learning is indispensable, such as in math, reading, and writing, he may not be able to understand the relationship of these basic skills to himself and his future career unless he is given a chance to exercise them regularly in career training. He may also find that the *orientation* of his English and math courses is unrelated to his interests and to the demands of the work he eventually hopes to find.

A high school . . . cannot expect to apply a single remedy to what appears an across-the-board problem.

Some students who should be pursuing a career program are sometimes pressured into the college-bound stream by over-zealous parents, administrators, teachers, and peers. Career education, though improving in status, still represents to many an "inferior path." The student, sensitive to this stigma, may labor through his required courses but without enthusiasm, active interest, or a sense of direction. He may not even be aware of why he is going to college. He

only knows that everyone else is going, and that mom, dad, and the math teacher think it's a good idea. Students like this crave guidance from parents, teachers, and counselors, but they don't always feel free to ask for it.

Students who pose an especially difficult challenge to teachers and counselors are the chronic underachievers who often are determined to drop out as soon as it is legally possible. Convincing them to stick out their senior year when freedom is beckoning is difficult.

Enrolling these students in "special" classes is insufficient and may serve only to reinforce a deep-seated feeling of inferiority. More than anything, many of these students need to gain a renewed feeling of self-respect and self-confidence, and this means succeeding at *something*, no matter what. Many can't wait; long and painful experience has made them impatient, and they cannot be convinced that "delay of gratification" will ultimately bring them anything but more failure.

... students need to gain a renewed feeling of self-respect and self-confidence.

Some prefer to opt for enrollment in part-time jobs or in vocational programs where they can witness the immediate and palpable fruits of their labors. As one ex-potential dropout enthusiastically reported to his principal after an on-the-job training program: "Hey, Mr. Larson, for the first time in my life I'm earning $140 a week—and really earning it!"

A fourth type of twelfth grader is the drifter. He is sick of school yet afraid of an uncertain future. Consequently, he drags himself through the twelfth grade without direction, clinging to what is familiar even though it has ceased to hold any meaning for him. Some of these students could have graduated after their junior year, as they had only one requirement left; but they chose to stay and socialize or "stick around with their friends" while they still had the chance.

One principal voiced his concern that this type of student is unable to adjust to the demands of freshman year in college: "Their study habits have completely deteriorated, so they enter unprepared to adjust to the demands of college." This student, perhaps more than any other, requires the close surveillance of a concerned counselor to help him discover his talents and abilities and how to pursue them.

These four types of students—the unchallenged college-oriented, the frustrated vocationally oriented, the discouraged underachiever, and the drifter—do not represent the entire student population. They simply represent prominent problem areas.

These types of students will vary widely from school to school, often with the location of the school; whether the school is inner-city, suburban, or rural, even though increased busing has partly altered the composition of many high schools. Inner-city schools must devote far more attention to the problems of culturally deprived minority group members than to those of the middle-class white population.

The size of the school is often a determining factor as well, affecting, for example, the feasibility of frequent one-to-one contact between student and teacher or student and counselor. And the background of the community—a powerful determinant of attitudes—can either aid or obstruct needed change. A later chapter examines these variables in closer detail.

Given this wide range of variables, there is no one answer to "the" twelfth-grade problem. Different principals will be seeking different answers to a common question: "What's wrong with the twelfth grade?" This is why a variety of causes, alternatives, and suggestions, instead of a single course of action, is presented here. It will be up to the individual principal to judge what may or may not be helpful.

Part Two: The Causes

THE REQUIREMENTS

ONE constraint that operates in almost every secondary school is state requirements. Regardless of whether a school has an alternative or traditional structure, these requirements must be met. Dealing with them is indispensable, therefore, in investigating the senior problem.

Universally applicable requirements do not necessarily work against constructive innovation. Dispensing with them entirely will not guarantee the elimination of restlessness, apathy, and disenchantment at the twelfth-grade level. Re-evaluating and restructuring them in terms of their overall distribution, content, and mode of presentation might well make some progress in this direction. In the case of most basic requirements, it is not that they are required so much as *how* they are required that aggravates senior unrest.

Unequal distribution. A widespread cause for senior slump is the premature completion of state requirements. Many students interviewed during this study finished three-fourths of their requirements by the time they had reached the twelfth grade. With only one English and one social studies course remaining, the senior year was a tremendous let-down to them.

Ironically, this problem was compounded in one high school by the school board's decision to reduce the number of required credits for graduation from 22 to 18 for the purpose of "loosening up" a rigid program and "easing" the overload. Unfortunately, this caused the students to slacken the demands on themselves and apathy resulted.

The reasons were twofold. First, the original overload problem had been caused partially by the common practice of having students take

too many requirements in their first two years, which generally results in a vacuum senior year. The elimination of some credits only exacerbated this problem. Secondly, the school failed to replace the old requirements with new and different kinds of demands. Since the chief goal instilled into the minds of most entering high school students is "finishing those 18 credits for graduation," its premature completion naturally leaves a vacuum.

Until schools define their tasks to include a greater stress upon the personal, social, and career goals of their students within the regular program, the simple reduction in requirements will only compound the problem. If the existing requirements were more evenly distributed across those four years, it would leave sufficient time along the way for the pursuit of different, yet equally important, goals.

Updating course content in a fast-changing world is bound to seem a losing battle.

Obsolete course content. Updating course content in a fast-changing world is bound to seem a losing battle. Nevertheless, the knowledge explosion is a very real challenge that must be met by every school. Students confronted daily by those ubiquitous knowledge dispensers—the television, radio, and newspaper—are often all too painfully aware of the discrepancy between what they encounter in the real world and what they learn in class. The problem becomes especially acute in the areas of the humanities and social sciences, whose contents and format are constantly changing with the times.

For the non-college-bound, trade-oriented student who is already reasonably sure of the trade he wishes to pursue, it is important not only to reorient the existing requirements with his career aims, but also to structure the desired career training into his regular high school program. Especially in the twelfth grade, where interests and propensities should have become more clearly defined and where the "real world" begins to take shape, career education* should become a fully integrated, fully accredited part of the program.

Counselors should begin investigating individual talents, propensities, and life-aims at least as early as the ninth grade, and continue to refine their investigation through the twelfth grade. This procedure is needed particularly in college-preparatory schools where the technically or trade-oriented minority is often neglected. It is not sufficient to provide an hour's time away from regular classroom studies for career instruction, either in the home school or elsewhere. The requirements should be structured and distributed from the ninth grade on in such a way that equal time can be devoted to both regular studies and career training of the student's own choice—training for which he

* See the NASSP *Bulletin*, March 1973, for several articles on the subject of career education.

should be able to earn full credit, whether in job apprenticeship, part-time employment, or intensive training at a technical school.*

The objection might be that any student so committed to career training should have attended a technical high school in the first place. But this assumes that the average ninth grader is certain of his priorities and life-goals. Asking a person to choose between a technical or college-preparatory high school at the age of 14 unjustly forecloses options and forces him to make a definite choice he may not yet be prepared to make. Today's high school should provide as many opportunities for career exploration and experimentation as possible and for as long as possible, so that no student need commit himself prematurely to one postgraduate path or another. As one principal said, "High school should be a time for falling flat on your face without its costing anything."

Diversifying the high school program may take more teaching, administrative, counseling time, and more funds than many school boards feel they can afford. One principal lamented, "Our technical program is grossly inadequate because the school district can't afford to offer instruction in all these particular trades. I hate to bus my kids elsewhere, but at the present time I have no other alternative."

Many high school administrators share this principal's dilemma. No high school will ever be able to provide everything it needs for a diversified program. There is nothing wrong with sending students to take advantage of other schools' programs and community resources. This kind of cooperation may well provide a suitable method for achieving options for everyone, and at a manageable cost. For this reason, no one should lament the break-up of the traditional home-school solidity and self-sufficiency. What should be lamented is the lack of constructive career counseling and the often unvoiced, yet pervasive, disapproval of student diversity in the areas of technical and career education.

It is too easy to dispense with standards amid the turmoil of change.

The requirements themselves—what to delete and add. Is it reasonable to have all students take four years of English, two of history and social studies, and three of math and science? Many disgruntled twelfth graders feel the cause of their miseries is the *existence* of the requirement system, and that if they didn't have to take English, social studies, math, and science, but could take any subject they pleased, all their problems would be solved.

Unfortunately, nothing is that simple. It is too easy to dispense with standards amid the turmoil of change. Most of the major discipline areas now included in the requirements must be retained in some form

* See NASSP's *Bulletin*, November 1974, for several articles on the subject of action learning. Also, NASSP's *25 Action Learning Schools*, a monograph published in 1974.

to prepare the student adequately to adjust and operate effectively in society. School administrators interviewed during this study agreed that without sufficient background in the basic skills of English, math, science, and social studies, a student would be inadequately prepared to deal with the postgraduate worlds of either further schooling or work. One principal from a progressive suburban school commented:

> There should be a program of basic skills for all kids up through high school, including particularly English and social studies skills. Simply because a kid has to sweat a little bit doesn't invalidate the program. Regardless of whether he's going to be an auto mechanic or a college student, there are certain basic skills he has to master. You can tailor from then on, to fit individual needs. The average high school graduate today is a pretty poor speller and writer. These areas shouldn't be watered down. We have to establish general standards.

... whether he's going to be an auto mechanic or a college student, there are certain basic skills he has to master.

Most students encountered during this study agreed (when pressed) that some basic skills were necessary. What may cause boredom for seniors, then, is not the irrelevance of the basic skill areas themselves, but the failure of the program to tailor to fit individual needs *within* those basic areas. Julius Menacker, in *Philosophy and Procedures for Student Transition Among High Schools, Community Colleges and Four-Year Institutions of Higher Education*, indicates that until the 1940s the completion of basic course requirements, or passing tests in them, was the main college admissions criterion. These requirements became outmoded around 1940 because, for one, general high school performance and aptitude data were proven to be the most reliable predictors of college performance, and also because the high schools became more comprehensive and added vocational-technical and general education programs.

Harvard's arts and sciences faculty's 1970 Special Committee on College Admissions Policy resisted pressure from some professors to adopt certain subject patterns as admissions requirements because, as they saw it, a four-year mathematics requirement would have kept out of Harvard no fewer than 126 of the 344 students who graduated *summa cum laude* in the classes of 1957 and 1958. The three-year secondary school language requirements would have excluded 127 of the same group.

On the other side of the coin, one major area of importance to *all* future high school graduates, which is *not* included in most state requirements, includes the practical knowledge every adult American citizen must have—especially in applied business, finance, and consumer affairs—to survive in today's complicated society. The typical

high school graduate today is frighteningly ignorant in these areas. And, if the society is to overcome the problems it now faces, it needs the understanding and cooperation of every citizen.

Most high schoolers, especially those in the twelfth grade, sense their deficiency in these areas. An important part of senioritis could, therefore, be an understandable impatience with the dearth of practical, applicable knowledge in just those areas *all* seniors will soon have to deal with. This includes buying and selling major commodities, such as homes and automobiles; investing; selecting insurance policies; filling out income tax statements; and learning how to consume in an economical manner, which respects both ecological balance and personal health.

THE PROBLEM OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT

UNDERACHIEVEMENT is particularly critical in the twelfth grade. By that time, achievement levels have often completely polarized. Unusually bright students may "ease up" in their senior year because they are tired of being unchallenged, and chronic underachievers may do the same thing because they are tired of failure and see no possibility for improvement.

How does one give special help to slower learners and to brighter students without deliberately tracking them by ability? No two principals totally agree on a solution. One principal of a suburban high school with a strong college-preparatory orientation claimed that separation by ability creates stigmas of superiority and inferiority harmful to student achievement and interaction. In his view, the Advanced Placement Program (APP) should be eliminated, and the brighter students should attend local colleges part-time for their college-level courses. "High school is not the place for this kind of effort," he reasoned. "Teachers' talents could be better used teaching regular high school courses, which is where they are needed most."

A guidance counselor of another mostly college-preparatory suburban school agreed that classes should be mixed, but with special attention given to slower learners. "Slow learners," she said, "tend to learn faster when they are exposed to better students."

However, one bright but weary senior, graduating early, described what turned out to be a double-edged problem in her mixed classes:

> In some classes, I received a lower grade than I thought I deserved, because the teacher thought I didn't do as well as so-and-so. But in other classes, I received an unearned A because I did so much better than most of the class. But I didn't work at all. As in one English class, at least half of the kids must have been nearly illiterate. There we were, trying to get through a chapter of Emerson, and they couldn't even pronounce the simplest words. It was ludicrous. 9

And what did she enjoy most about the summer school courses she was taking to graduate early? "They were intensive and we could work at our own pace. I was really learning something for once!"

What is the correct method for dealing with these problems? What accounts for the success or failure of a particular program? To make sense of these puzzles, we must sort out the different variables affecting underachievement. The following list is oversimplified, but it illustrates the complexity of the problem:

- Physical or mental disability
- Lack of ability in a particular discipline
- Lack of appropriate background
- Lack of self-confidence
- Lack of interest in particular course material
- Lack of accord between course orientation and postgraduate aims
- Lack of challenging material.

No single cause is ever absolute and many of the above may overlap. In the first case, a student disabled mentally or physically obviously cannot be placed in a class of regular students and be expected to keep up with just a little more individual attention from the teacher. Special classes—and even schools—may be required. Placing these students with normal ones may reinforce their feelings of inferiority and their inability to perform normally.

In the second case, a student may lack a propensity for work in a certain subject, or for textbook-classroom learning in general. His skills may lie more in a practical direction. He may, for example, have a difficult time dealing with abstract concepts, but work brilliantly with his hands. Many of these students may require greater opportunities to apply classroom skills to the practical world. Working on a class dramatic production or a political campaign may do more for this student than any amount of extra help in an English literature or American politics course.

Lack of appropriate background becomes a serious problem when former teachers, out of exasperation or disinterest, pass chronic underachievers who do not have the knowledge and skills necessary for higher level work. The bitter fruits of this expediency are reaped later on in high school, when the student finds himself too far behind to be able to cope. The example of the frustrated senior girl sitting by while nearly illiterate students struggled through a paragraph of Emerson is a case in point.

Close scrutiny of all students arriving from feeder schools—regarding their previous performance, problems, and present abilities—should be a prerequisite to scheduling. Continuous individual counseling for chronic underachievers should be required all through high school, not only to arrange special programs designed to fill the gaps and raise students to the standard level, but also to explore with them various skill areas (especially on the practical side) in
10 which they might display unusual interest or ability. Discovery of

success in any endeavor, no matter how seemingly far removed from the general high school curriculum and its demands, may enhance a student's self-confidence enough to improve even his regular class performance.

Lack of self-confidence, while obviously a serious problem for students arriving in high school already behind their classmates, can still plague even those students of adequate preparation and ability. Individual conferences and extra encouragement are especially important for these students. The kind of comparative grading mentioned earlier in connection with the frustrated senior who was either graded too high or too low can be fatal to self-confidence and should have no place in any classroom—especially a mixed one. The teacher should be careful to judge each student relative only to his own past performance and never relative to the achievement of others.

GUIDANCE COUNSELING AND THE PROBLEM OF TRANSITION

ONE twelfth-grade girl, anxious to investigate different colleges, walked into the guidance counselor's office several times one day, only to be told repeatedly that the counselor was too busy to see her. She was directed to a stack of college bulletins and catalogs in the corner of the office, to which she was advised to "direct any questions she might have." Another student, interested in finding a secretarial job, was given a similar reception and told to consult the latest employment directory. But a printed page can tell only so much.

The invaluable one-to-one contacts between student and counselor are sometimes too brief and too infrequent, even in the best high schools. Like school administrators, they have been increasingly victimized by a plethora of paper work which has taken them away from what should be their main concern: the students.

Numbers are also a problem. Where the number of students per counselor is unusually high there is little possibility of consistent, in-depth counseling for each student. This is one of the most serious problems schools face today. If they are to tailor their programs to suit the needs of each student *without* tracking him, they require sufficient guidance counseling services to establish regular contact with every student.

The counseling department must be large enough to permit some degree of specialization. At present, each member of what is usually a small staff must be an expert on everything from individual student background—academic and family—to current student performance and problems, student postgraduate aims, college and employment opportunities, and postgraduate followup. The task is evidently unmanageable.

One particularly neglected area of concern is that of individual student background. Lack of adequate knowledge of a student's past problems and performance may result in unwise scheduling or a mismatch of student and ability, interest, or level of preparation.

Articulation between high schools and colleges is still less than fully developed.

Not only do guidance counseling services have to reach into the past to solve the cumulative problems that erupt during senior year; they must also reach more into the future. Most counseling services are still guilty of providing very limited and often biased information on the postgraduate world. Guidance counseling has been biased in favor of college education at the expense of other equally viable postgraduate options. The student does not feel encouraged to explore other areas, and he often does not know enough about his own talents and propensities—especially in a college-oriented school—to begin exploring in the right direction. There must be a concerted effort made on the part of guidance counseling services to provide adequate information in each one of these areas and to encourage student exploration.

In considering postgraduate options, the college-bound student often finds himself applying to college without really knowing why. Social and school pressures and parental expectations push him to a decision. The fault, however, does not lie entirely with the high school counseling departments; a healthy share must be assigned to college admissions departments. Articulation between high schools and colleges is still less than fully developed. Many colleges have still not defined with any degree of clarity what admissions policies should be, what courses or skills should be required, and what information counselors and incoming students really need. The high schools therefore have no solid guidelines along which to prepare or advise their students.

On the other side of the coin, counselors often fail to provide information on other post-secondary educational possibilities and institutions other than colleges and universities. Many technically or career-oriented students still feel the negative stigma of *not* going to college from parents, teachers, and counselors—especially in heavily college-bound high schools. Counselors have a responsibility for directing and encouraging these students as those in the college-bound group. These students should be given assistance in exploring training alternatives such as technical schools, apprenticeship opportunities, and local employment.

These students ought to enjoy flexible schedules—especially by the twelfth grade—so that they can spend a portion of their day on the job

or in the training of their choice. Direct experience during high school will give many of them a more solid basis for making responsible future plans.*

The third type of student, the aimless drifter, has no idea what his interests and talents are. Counselors should devote a large part of their time to precisely this kind of student to help him discover hidden talents and interests, explore various postgraduate options, and acquaint him thoroughly with the world of work in general. This would be an indispensable service, particularly for inner-city students from culturally deprived backgrounds, who have grown up isolated from the social and cultural mainstream and often have no way of knowing *how* to investigate the postgraduate world, or even how to obtain a job.

If all these recommendations were instituted now, an unreasonable burden of responsibility would be placed upon even the most conscientious counseling team. This is a just criticism. It may well take more financial and personal resources than most high schools have at present. But unless school boards allow their high schools to widen their efforts in these areas, the schools will be unable to relate meaningfully to their students' pasts and futures. The resulting isolation of the high school experience may perpetuate and perhaps deepen many of the problems in the senior year.

* NASSP's monograph *25 Action Learning Schools* describes how these kinds of programs are running in 25 schools throughout the country.

SOCIAL-CULTURAL CHANGES

THE upheavals secondary education is experiencing are only part of broader sociocultural changes that have come about in the past 10 to 15 years and have brought about the questioning of formerly accepted values and norms.

For one, the social conscience of the nation has been profoundly shaken. The explosion of pent-up energy and frustration now emerging in the black movement and the women's liberation movement has burst middle-class complacency at the seams. Vigorous assertion of the right for dignity and equal opportunity has been, and continues to be, a powerful leveling force in the society.

America is moving into a new era marked by a more widespread sense of social tolerance than it has ever known. The popular slogan "do your own thing" (as hackneyed and inarticulate an expression as it may be) does convey a tolerance for diversity that is distinctly modern. Traditionally approved life-styles and goals are no longer seen as the only acceptable alternatives.

This change in values has brought about a major re-evaluation of the tenets and goals of our educational system. A good college education is no longer the only aim of a good high school education. 13

Postgraduate preferences are changing. Many avenues that were once discouraged are now opening up. If a son prefers auto mechanics to professional engineering, his parents need no longer be ashamed of him. And if he wishes to hold a variety of jobs instead of committing himself to a life-long professional career, he is not necessarily "copping out"; he may simply wish to guarantee himself a diversified and interesting life.

Perceiving the many opportunities that await them, high school seniors begin to feel impatient if their high school programs lack diversity. They can no longer relate to the uniformity of program, content, course orientation, and to the limitations of classroom learning. Widening opportunities in the outside world have made sons and daughters impatient with the in-school constraints and limitations that seemed natural to their fathers and mothers.

In the increasing democratization of the country, the younger generation has gained a voice and a status it never knew before. Because youth is the eternal symbol of change, any era of change tends to look to its youth for fresh ideas and leadership. The lowering of the age of majority is only one manifestation of the growing influence and power of today's young people in the system. Young adults now occupy more influential positions in government, business, politics, and other important fields than would have been possible 10 years ago.

High schools must walk the delicate line between obsolescence and chaos . . .

One aspect of this new effort to incorporate the nation's youth into the working establishment is an emphasis upon the prerogatives and responsibilities of young Americans to shape their own future and to take an active part in structuring their own education. Their desire for an anti-traditional alternative arises partly from students' frustration over the rigidity of some curricula. In their frustration, many twelfth graders have plunged off the deep end by applying either to loosely or entirely unstructured colleges or by floating aimlessly from odd job to odd job.

Some claim that this is a satisfactory solution. But others cannot adjust to the abrupt change from total structure to an often total lack of structure. A twelfth-grade program composed of fixed periods, fixed requirements, large classes, and hall passes obviously provides no helpful transition to looser kinds of structures. A student must become gradually accustomed to assuming responsibility and making his own decisions if he expects to be able to adjust to greater freedom after graduation. This means that schools should restructure their twelfth grade programs if they are to be a valuable testing ground.

High schools must walk the delicate line between obsolescence and chaos; they must work to find a healthy blend of structure and flexibility for impatient students.

One justification that has been cited for conferring more responsibility upon young people at an earlier age is the knowledge explosion of the past 10 to 20 years and its effect upon human development. Technological change—including the development of rapid transportation and mass communication—has had an incalculable effect on the intellectual maturation of young people.

This does not mean that their emotional and personal maturation is also more rapid; only that course content is rapidly becoming obsolete and that the average student's level of ability may be rising more quickly. Many courses now seem unchallenging to students.

Today's social, environmental, and political problems have emphasized the need for a cooperation of classroom and community, and a synthesis of the theoretical and the practical. The academic ivory tower alone will not solve the problems that press for immediate solutions, particularly when their solution depends on a broad understanding of the complex interrelationships that constitute our society.

When large corporations pollute with impunity and without the slightest awareness of the effects of their actions upon the health and future of the surrounding community, it is evidence that specialization has exceeded the limits of social sanction. Some specialization will always be necessary, and will continue to be encouraged at the postgraduate level. It must therefore fall to compulsory education to provide a broad enough common framework for all students so that they can later place their various trades and professions into a meaningful context.

Alfred North Whitehead very eloquently expressed the need to marry the practical and the intellectual in order to give students a broader meaning to their own individual pursuits—a meaning that would enable them to relate their work to the larger social context:

> The antithesis between a technical and a liberal education is fallacious. There can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal, and no liberal education which is not technical; that is, no education which does not impart both technique and intellectual vision. In simpler language, education should turn out the pupil with something he knows well, and something he can do well.

Technological change . . . has had an incalcuable effect on the intellectual maturation of young people.

It is especially vital that schools during the twelfth grade encourage cooperation between classroom and community and between abstract theory and its application to real problems. When a student learns to identify the discrepancy between traditional assumptions about the American political system and, say, the reality of Watergate, he gains first-hand knowledge in theory and practice.

Furthermore, high schools sometimes neglect to train students to make ethical judgments. One down-to-earth principal of a highly

reputed suburban high school exclaimed, "We've done a heck of a good job teaching knowledge and a heck of a lousy job teaching values!"

If curriculum is to be expanded, high schools should not rely exclusively on either classroom learning or community action learning. The classroom alone is not adequate, but neither is the community. Employers know their own trades, but they are not secondary school teachers. The intellectual discipline acquired in the classroom must be encouraged to confront the practical problems in the community if public education is to serve a constructive function in society. And twelfth grade is the ideal time for fostering just this kind of balanced perspective. But first it behooves us to examine human nature and to separate legitimate dissatisfaction from ordinary human weakness.

It is only natural that some students, sensing their new influence and status in modern society, should choose to indulge in a perpetual human failing: the avoidance of hard work. Some insist that "all learning should be fun," a thin disguise for laziness and impatience. Learning is an investment and a commitment which demands a mature resignation to some amount of tediousness—especially in the acquisition of basic skills—and sometimes to painful exertion, frustration, and the delay of gratification.

. . . doing this should never involve a lowering of standards and a promise of easy success.

Opening up options and providing more freedom for students help overcome the needless rigidity spoken of earlier, but doing this should never involve a lowering of standards and a promise of easy success. All human beings have a tendency to want to avoid hard work, and it is a tendency that must be combatted constantly.

Students may be especially impatient with classroom and textbook learning today when they have grown up under the influence of more exciting knowledge dispensers like the radio, television, and cinema. These media have sensationalized knowledge and provide countless opportunities for intellectual escape, just as the automobile readily permits physical escape.

Among the effects of these technological luxuries have been a fragmentation of reflective thought, a shortened attention span, a craving for immediacy and an inability to postpone gratification, and a decline in students' ability to use spoken and written language correctly, clearly, and concisely. One principal took a strong stand on this issue: "We've got to emphasize basic skills more. The average high school student today is an atrocious speller and writer. We have to maintain some kind of general standards."

In light of these problems, high schools might do better to combat the knowledge explosion and the effects of the mass media and *avoid* duplicating and endorsing the fragmentation, sensationalism, and im-

mediacy of the outside world. Instead of making all learning "fun" and "experiential," they must insist that their students persevere, master a common body of basic skills, and perform up to certain set standards.

A field trip to a local Shakespeare theater may enrich the curriculum, but it will not teach students to write a correct English sentence. It could well be that for some kinds of learning, the "ivory tower" classroom and book approach is best. Because it is removed from the noise, confusion, and distractions of the working community, it is more conducive to the kind of concentration and systematic drilling needed to master certain basic skills, and the kind of detachment required for highly symbolic cognitive forms of learning.

Some schools have already dispensed with the needed standards and structure, for fear of being charged with "irrelevancy." One school, while investigating its English program, discovered that the majority of its students did not read for their own enjoyment, that they found writing essentially a chore, and that they disliked language study through grammar. The faculty concluded that their English program "was not really making a significant contribution to the educational process" of the students.

Learning to write well is to sweat, to stumble, to fail, to discard, to try again. Should we therefore conclude that all these tasks run counter to the best interests of high school students because they occasionally elicit a grimace and a protest? True learning is difficult, as is anything that brings about growth. It requires exertion and some discomfiture. Before we provide students so much choice and so little discipline that they become pampered into lethargy, it is important to review the purpose of education: Is education supposed to give a student everything he wants— or what he needs, but may not be able to appreciate until he is older?

True learning is difficult, as is anything that brings about growth.

Without a sense of conviction and leadership in the sometimes unpopular task of educating, high schools could become mere instruments of popular movement and student whim, losing all sense of purpose. They would surely abdicate their function as the forgers of that human raw material which must soon confront a very complex and troubled society. And as any blacksmith knows, forging cannot be done without applying the necessary heat and pressure.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE TYPE AND EXTENT OF PROBLEMS

THE factors that influence the particular configuration of problems in any one school are varied and complex.

Perhaps the most obvious factor is the composition of the student body, which varies most often with location. Whether a school is located in an inner-city, suburban, or outlying rural area will influence the types of problems it faces. Inner-city schools, especially in large metropolitan areas, must generally devote far more attention to the problems of the culturally deprived and minority groups than to the problems students coming from an educated background have.

The administrators and counselors of one inner-city school had to spend a large part of their time working to prevent pregnant senior girls from dropping out. "We've been able to keep a number of them," said one administrator, "but we've had to arrange special afternoon classes for some because many teachers wouldn't take them back." The administrators, counselors, and teachers of this type of school must put much time and energy into the problem of simply finding strong enough incentives to keep their seniors in school.

Schools presently undergoing substantial changes in composition due to zoning changes or busing face particularly acute problems. One urban high school, which changed its racial composition in the last two years, went from sending 90 percent of its students to college to 75 percent.

Suburban schools face different kinds of dilemmas, such as how to keep their bright-but-bored college-bound seniors challenged while attending to the needs of those students studying technical courses.

Parental and community attitudes are important factors that can either hinder or enhance possibilities for an exciting and diverse twelfth-grade program. Convincing some parents to sanction an extended technical program in their children's school when they want them to go to college because "*they* never had a chance to" can be a major undertaking. It requires much time, patience, and personal contact with individual parents. In inner-city schools, community and cultural barriers may make it even more difficult to *establish* contact with parents. A great deal of time must be devoted to seeking them out and personally inviting them to take an active part in the planning of their youngster's school program and postgraduate path.

The predominant attitudes of the local school board can either aid or
18 obstruct progress. If an essentially prejudiced or reactionary faction

dominates, the individual high school may be denied the funds necessary to support needed innovations. And, of course, it often happens that the school board is composed of and influenced mostly by the most powerful and assertive community groups or classes.

Aside from variations in community support, differences in the tax bases of different area schools can help determine what changes a particular school can or cannot afford to implement, or even how well equipped it is to deal with day-to-day problems. Inner-city schools and some rural schools are obviously at a disadvantage. When an inner-city school of 2,000 or more students can afford to hire only two guidance counselors, is it any wonder the latter are inaccessible?

State laws pertaining to requirements for graduation, allowable alternatives for the acquisition of high school and college credit, and permission to graduate early can either benefit or hinder change. One principal wistfully responded to a question about whether senior students could acquire college credit by attending courses at a nearby community college:

"Alas, no," he sighed, "only high school credit. State law forbids any college courses taken in high school to go towards college credit. This obviously makes early graduation more difficult for those who really desire it."

The proximity and cooperation of various community and institutional resources, such as two- and four-year colleges, technical schools, businesses, and cultural resources such as local theaters, symphonies, and art galleries, are powerful determinants of the degree of variety possible in any high school program. Since most high schools cannot afford to provide all the resources a diverse program requires, cooperation with outside institutions is often necessary. High schools located in rural areas far removed from sizable urban centers, therefore, face a particularly serious obstacle. Time, transportation costs, and communication between the high school staff and the far-away resources are often outside the range of these schools.

The number, attitudes, and devotion of the faculty exert perhaps the most direct influence of all upon senior attitudes.

The size of the school is an important factor as well, affecting, for example, the feasibility of frequent one-to-one contact. Smaller schools are obviously more conducive to greater individual attention than large ones, both in the classroom and the counselor's office. A school with a student body of 90 and a senior class of only 14 responded to a questionnaire on senior problems by saying no problems existed. For most schools, however, optional size is not an option. Reorganizing and rehiring are often attempts to improve relations between students and their teachers and counselors. And it's often a losing battle when cutbacks in funds make consolidation necessary.

The number, attitudes, and devotion of the faculty exert perhaps the most direct influence of all upon senior attitudes. Many teachers are

forced to take an impersonal stand toward their classroom duties and their students because they are torn by tasks that extend beyond the classroom. This situation often arises in schools that cannot afford to hire enough supplementary staff and must therefore ask its teaching staff to serve as jacks-of-all-trades.

Students become understandably impatient with a teacher who punches the clock promptly at 8:30 each morning and leaves brusquely at 3:00, without staying ten extra minutes to help them with a problem. But, if that teacher's day is filled with uninterrupted headaches and a constant deluge of conflicting and, at times, unmanageable responsibilities, his or her brusqueness becomes equally understandable. Finding means to relieve overburdened teaching staff, however, is not always easy, particularly when the school is on a tight budget. What *is* reprehensible, however, is the intransigent conservatism and resistance to constructive change that many high school teachers—especially those members in long standing—are too often guilty of.

Students can have a meaningful voice in their own education without actually running the school.

The attitudes of the administration can make a big difference in determining the exact interplay of all these forces and in defining the atmosphere of the entire school. As many administrators know too well, treading the delicate line between corporal and comrade is no easy task.

Some principals, facing a situation that threatens to erupt into social and academic chaos, have answered with a hard-line policy. Others, conscious of the obsolescence of their school's program, have pulled out all the stops and *created* chaos. In their desire to be "relevant," they have ceased to perform their function as leaders and have instead given their students carte blanche to educate themselves any way they want. Although the trend today is away from structure, most administrators agree that some is necessary and desirable. Students can have a meaningful voice in their own education without actually running the school. Most students involved in this study support this general notion and expressed disrespect for those administrators who had abnegated their authority. One student council leader praised her principal's leadership ability: "He was wonderfully receptive to our ideas, but, boy, when the crunch was on, you *really* knew where he stood."

Aside from establishing a sense of order and conviction in the school, an administrator can also be the vital catalyst for intra- and inter-school communication. He can encourage frequent exchange of ideas among administrators, students, faculty, counselors, and representatives from other high schools and postsecondary institutions. His openness, curiosity, and concern can set an example that will start ideas circulating up through all levels. Not only will this kind of communication and cooperation help encourage in-

novative ideas of interest to all, but will foster the spirit of community which is vital to any student's sense of belonging and of *mattering* in his school.

Most administrators feel that this *should* be one of their most important functions, but many feel they are bogged down by organizational duties. In a recent survey of high schools nationwide by the NASSP, principals were asked to list the most persistent obstacle they faced as high school administrators. One of the most frequent responses indicated an overabundance of paper work and administrative red tape.

Most principals would like to have the time to be accessible to students and faculty on a constant basis, but they are understandably frustrated in their intentions by a multitude of other worries. High school staff organization must be altered so that administrative concern, talent, and leadership does not go to waste. In this era of change, good leadership is too precious to be wasted.

Part Three: Some Alternatives

DIVERSIFYING THE CURRICULUM THROUGH MINI-COURSES

A disillusioned high school graduate in describing what had made her senior year so disappointing said:

> Well, most courses were just repetitions of what I'd had before. English 12 wasn't that much different from English 11, especially because we used the same kind of anthologies and we didn't have any more freedom than before to define our own program. The only course I enjoyed was my political science course, and I think I liked it because the subject was entirely new to me.

As some innovative high schools across the country are now demonstrating, this girl's twelfth-grade experience was an unnecessary one. Greater diversity within departments—in the areas of subject matter, postgraduate orientation, ability level, and teaching methods—is enriching what has long been a mere system of requirements. Through the introduction of such alternatives as mini-course programs, some high schools are now giving their students the chance to satisfy personal interest, coordinate course approach with their own postgraduate aspirations, and fulfill a required number of credits—all in one.

One progressive high school in suburban Washington, D.C., claims a particularly successful mini-course program. This experimental system of nine-week courses applies only to English and social studies because the principal and staff had deemed these the most important basic skill areas for future graduates and because those subjects were most in need of renovation and diversification. 21

Under the social studies requirement, a student must complete one full credit of U.S. government and history and two credits of electives. Yet an enormous amount of flexibility exists within that framework. There are several major course selections (aside from U.S. History and Government) from which a student can choose his two electives: World History (Modern), Problems of the Twentieth Century, Social Studies Seminar, Human Relations, and Community Intern Program.

All except the Community Internship Program are divided into four nine-week courses. A senior enrolling in Problems of the Twentieth Century might take Social Control his first quarter, Mass Media his second, Crime and Violence his third, and Comparative Economic Systems his fourth. And even the U.S. Government and History requirement itself—which most eleventh and twelfth graders in traditional programs find dull—boasts at least 18 mini-courses, ranging from early history to current issues.

The English department has also been diversified. The program has been divided into three mini-departments: Skills and Language (dealing with English as a basic tool of communication), Speech and Media (which explores the modern emphasis upon nonwritten communication), and Literature. This last division includes a potpourri of topics such as Hermann Hesse, realism, British poetry, comedy, Greco-Roman literature, and a Steinbeck and Salinger seminar.

Besides giving a new flexibility to the usually restricted English and social studies requirements, many of the new mini-course programs place more responsibility on the individual student. The structure within these courses is flexible, and a lot of course work is arranged by contract and done outside class. Final exams have been supplanted by "culminating activities," which are negotiated at the outset by the teacher and individual student and which may include giving a panel presentation, putting on a play, or taking an exam.

. . . many of the new mini-course programs place more responsibility on the individual student.

But what about academic standards? If students are no longer all taking the same courses or being tested together, how can the school adequately judge their ability to do work in postgraduate institutions? One principal saw no danger to academic standards in his program: "We've found that the SAT scores for these kids are just as high as before the mini-courses were introduced. Many of our former students return from college and claim that the mini-courses had prepared them more than adequately for college work."

To ensure the maintenance of academic standards in the English program and to match students with the appropriate ability levels, all entering students are given an equivalency exam which covers the
22 following three areas: the mechanics of English and grammar, reading

comprehension, and composition (a written sample is required). The results of these assessments are used by the English department to help counsel their students in their program choices. If a student is below a minimum cut-off point in grammar, for example, he will take a mini-course designed to help him strengthen those skills. Composition receives a great deal of emphasis, and provision has been made to incorporate some composition instruction into any mini-course a student selects at any ability level.

Clarity and cohesion in any program require frequent contact and consultation . . .

If a student passes all three of the above tests, is he then free to take any array of courses he wishes? He is not constrained to take a year of American Literature, as he is required to take a year of American History and Government in social studies, but he is strongly advised by his counselor to cover the following general areas during his three years: semantics or the history of language; a course in composition; a survey of the four basic modes (or an in-depth study of each); a survey of genre or a course in each of the following: drama, poetry, short story, and novel; contemporary communication: speech, discussion techniques, or one of the media courses.

With such a degree of choice available in the English program, do students of differing abilities really group themselves appropriately? Apparently so. This particular program seems to have actually eliminated the need for special programs for either the underachieving or the precocious, because the wide latitude of choice permits the division of aptitude voluntarily—by the students themselves—instead of by administrative edict.

"It's a kind of natural selection process," says the principal. "We're quite sure it's working, because many of our brighter kids who want Advanced Placement credit for their college applications have taken the AP exam and done well, even though the mini-courses have completely replaced our AP program. And kids who *aren't* planning to go to college naturally select courses of a more practical and less theoretical orientation, and are happy they don't have to study Shakespeare in English 12."

What has been the overall student reaction to the mini-courses? On the whole, it has been favorable. Some students, however, had less than positive experiences. One college freshman, reflecting on his senior year mini-courses, commented: "I thought the mini-courses were poor. The teachers weren't qualified to teach specialized subjects, because they'd always taught general courses. So the material was really watered down. Besides, nine weeks isn't enough time to cover much ground. A lot of kids knew this and didn't take the courses seriously enough."

Retraining teachers for the more highly specialized mini-courses is an important and indispensable prerequisite to a good program. But it takes time. One enterprising urban California high school holds Saturday workshops, which have been introduced through the use of additional funding and operate to provide staff involvement through new materials' development.

Since a six-day week might well prove too taxing for many teachers, some schools have been considering the consolidation of class time into a four-day week, in order to give teachers an extra day to devote to instructional improvements.

How have most teachers responded to the introduction of mini-courses into their school's curriculum? Most seem to be pleased with the greater freedom and responsibility. The April, 1973, NASSP *Curriculum Report*, dealing with new alternatives in English, praised the new elective programs as producing a stronger sense of professionalism among teachers. But some instructors see this new freedom as bordering on anarchy and causing fragmentation within the curriculum.

Carefully formulated goals are needed in order to integrate diverse mini-courses effectively into a system of general requirements, as is careful prescheduling counseling. Not all subject matter is of equal value in the teaching of a discipline, and not just any arrangement of nine-week courses will do. Clarity and cohesion in any program require frequent contact and consultation among teachers, counselors, administrators, and students. This kind of communication may well help solve some of the problems of organization and definition that now exist in some mini-course programs.

TAKING LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

THE only activities one bright high school graduate had enjoyed her senior year were extracurricular: "I was tired of just taking courses by then. I really enjoyed working on a school play and on the yearbook staff. It makes such a difference getting to *do* something."

High school courses, especially those in the humanities and arts, should profit from school and community facilities and integrate creative activity into the regular program. One Ohio high school has created a program for juniors and seniors that offers "performance electives." These semester courses stress doing and creating in the arts, and include film-making, photography, mass media, oral communication, creative writing, journalism, drama workshop, and advanced composition.

The humanities and arts are not meant to be studied in isolation, where course content is divorced from individual participation. The student who yawns his way through a drama-reading assignment may feel different when confronted with the task of staging that play. And yet, performance alone is not adequate and would not constitute a complete education in itself. One English course, for example, might start out with an analysis of the structure, characterization, symbolism, and historical context of Ibsen's *Doll House* in class, and then use that information to render a sensitive and believable production of the play. The two kinds of experiences could thus lend strength to each other.

performance alone is not adequate and would not constitute a complete education in itself.

Class and community—bridging the gap. An artistic performance is only one example of how knowledge can be applied in the living world. More and more provision is being made in innovative high schools for the application of classroom learning to real problems and issues in the community. These programs are often intended chiefly for seniors who generally have a lighter academic schedule than underclassmen and have a greater desire and need to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world.

A successful senior program is called the Alternative Learning Program. In it, seniors are given a large say in what, when, where, and how they are to study. Credit for twelfth-grade social studies, for example, can be earned through an internship in local government or by working on a political campaign. Some English students who elected to study Shakespeare attended and evaluated local theater performances. Many math students spent their time working as tutors.

"Help from teachers was very important in giving direction," one student said. "All of us in ALP were also urged to cooperate with the other kids working on similar projects. A real feeling of community developed among everyone in the program." This student believed that some seniors would actually have dropped out of school if it hadn't been for ALP.

"I know that I was bored in my regular classes senior year. But in ALP, there was no time wasted. All the work you did was real work, because it was on your own time."

The program turned out to be more than simply a stimulant to drooping senior spirits. Its effects extended beyond high school.

Such alternative learning programs teach independent study habits which are of incalculable value to those planning to continue their education. And for those not going immediately on to further schooling, valuable job opportunities are opened up. [25]

Another format for learning outside the classroom is New York State's Executive High School Internship Program. It provides apprenticeship opportunities for high school juniors or seniors in various local agencies and organizations for full high school credit. Applicants are screened according to their observed leadership ability, initiative, personal maturity, and capability of taking on an important role in an organization's staff. The program then enables a student to spend a semester as a full-time special assistant-in-training to the executive sponsor of the organization.

The intern receives full academic credit for his semester in the organization if he keeps a careful journal of daily activities, performs well in the program, and submits a project to the high school at the end of the semester. However, he remains officially enrolled in the high school for his or her normal academic program (which might include chemistry, calculus, a language, English, and social studies), and receives "CR" ("credit received") in each of these at the end of the semester, unless he takes a final exam in each, in which case he receives a final grade. If the results are not satisfactory, he will still receive the "CR".

Some of the different kinds of internships that have been undertaken include the following:

- *Community Development Internship:* Developing and implementing policies supporting community action programs in New York City.
- *Manpower Internship:* Developing and implementing manpower training programs and helping locate new jobs for trainees.
- *Community Affairs Internships:* Meeting with community groups that want city agencies to be responsive to their needs, and developing appropriate agency policies.
- *Legal Internships:* Interning with government and private agencies concerned with legal services and law enforcement.
- *Labor Internships:* Interning with union executives who deal with city agencies.
- *Education Internships:* Developing policies in curriculum, student affairs, governance, etc., as an Executive Intern with administrators in elementary, secondary, and higher education and with concerned citizens organizations.
- *Humanities Internships:* Interning with executives in the education and community relations areas of museums and libraries.
- *Consumer Affairs Internships:* Overseeing state and city programs involved with consumer education, protection, legislation, and enforcement.
- *Budget and Fiscal Internships:* Helping develop and analyze budgets of city agencies and public institutions and helping to create the fiscal policy of an agency.
- *Communications Internships:* Functioning with executives in the fields of public affairs and mass media in the areas of writing, general production, and policy development.

Using free time constructively. Constructive use of free time is especially important in the twelfth grade, when some students have only two or three requirements left, and face half a day of study halls and unnecessary electives.

One school instituted an Instructionally Related Activity period, which can include any activity having some constructive relationship to class work. Some schools enable students to acquire paying jobs during the school day, which serve as refreshing changes of pace and also a chance to earn money. Many schools now offer tutoring programs or independent study projects, especially for upperclassmen.

CAREER EDUCATION: BRIDGING THE GAP TO THE WORLD OF WORK

"THE apathy and alienation of many of our young people are too profound and too pervasive to be said to be a matter of occupational unpreparedness alone. We have on our hands an entire generation of boys and girls who are rapidly becoming men and women and who fail to understand what they are to do when the transition is complete. Inculcating that understanding is what career education is all about."

Sidney P. Marland, Jr., former HEW assistant secretary for education, in this quote says in no uncertain terms that the traditional concept of career education as signifying just vocational education must be expanded greatly if today's high school student is to emerge into the world with confidence and direction.

Busing technically oriented students to nearby vocational high schools twice a week does not constitute a complete career education program. Counseling services must devote far more time to exploring career options with the student, acquainting him with the nature and demands of different careers, familiarizing him with the world of work in general (for example, how to get and keep a job), and constantly establishing new liaisons between the high school and the working community. Many innovative high schools have shown that possibilities for this kind of cooperation do indeed exist.

To give its students an idea of the nature and demands of different careers, one rural Virginia high school yearly asks its students to list those career areas they would most like to learn about, and then arranges interviews between students and representatives from each of the most frequently mentioned career areas.

A California high school invites a career speaker a week to lead a discussion with interested students. A new suburban Virginia school

plans to use its own teaching staff as teacher-advisers. Each teacher-adviser will be responsible for 20 students, and will inform them about career opportunities in their own particular fields.

Another suburban Virginia school, serving as a vocational center for six area high schools, recognized the importance of involving parents in career education and planning. Its principal said:

> A lot of our parents are middle-class and consider college the only respectable choice for their youngsters. It's been a hard fight convincing them that some kids are cut out for more practical lines of work and need to go to work now. One son was a merit finalist, and the next younger son was a do-nothing, academically. The parents came to me reluctantly asking if they could try him in technical education. When he turned out to be successful at a particular trade, they lost their skepticism.

One note of caution, however: regardless of how new and exciting the concepts of increased action-learning and career education in high school programs may be, a substantial number of jobs that must be filled in the average American community are relatively undemanding, unvaried, and even tedious. A recent statistic indicated that at least 50 percent of the jobs that would be filled by the average high school graduate require minimal skills that can be learned quickly on the job and need no prior training.

It is a grave mistake to mislead eager high school students about the true nature of most jobs, by waving the bright banner of "career education" over their heads and promising them all jobs perfectly tailored to their individual needs and desires. Just as parents and counselors must not over-romanticize the college experience—which many disillusioned freshmen have discovered to be little different from high school—career counseling programs must not over-glorify the world of employment. On-site visits, apprenticeship programs, and internships may well help instill realistic attitudes and expectations about future employment.

Many among the once-solid college contingent are finding out that college isn't for them.

Structuring career training into the twelfth-grade program. Sixty-eight percent of the secondary school principals nationwide responding to the questionnaire for this monograph reported a definite increase in the number of seniors choosing technical-business training and the job market over college. It has become apparent in the last few years that values and priorities have changed. Many among the once-solid college contingent are finding out that college *isn't* for them. Many realize they can accept immediate jobs with a set of concrete marketable skills not provided by college. Others are discovering that technical work is in some cases more lucrative than some kinds of professional, white-collar work.

And yet, surveys have shown that the peak of unemployment for those not in school occurs at the ages of 18 and 19—in other words, right after high school graduation. The unemployment rate for these young people was 16 or 17 percent for boys and slightly more for girls, and the black unemployment rate was double that of whites.

It should be obvious that despite the changing priorities and preferences of young people, the high schools are not adequately preparing them for postgraduate work. If the many students *not* in the college-bound sector are to make a smooth transition to the world of work, they must have the opportunity to participate in the training of their choice while they are still in high school. Without experience in the working demands of that particular job or trade, seniors will scarcely be able to make a responsible and knowledgeable career choice upon graduating, and their lack of skills may well squeeze them out of an already tight market. And it has been found that students who have had considerable work experience during high school earn higher salaries, indicate greater job satisfaction, and are only one-fifth as likely to be unemployed in the years immediately following graduation than those that have had no work experience.

Most high schools obviously lack the manpower and funds to provide adequate job training on their own.

Most high schools obviously lack the manpower and funds to provide adequate job training on their own. Cooperation among high schools, colleges, employers, parents, and students must be fostered in order to provide enough resources to assure a good career education program.

A pilot project has been proposed by the school district of Pontiac, Mich., which would enable high school students to apprentice on a one-to-one basis with employees in various local agencies and industries. In the "Pontiac Adult-Student Learning System," each high school student would select from a catalog of local participating companies and agencies an area of career interest which could range from entry jobs to management, and would then receive individual instruction in that area five to 10 hours a week for one semester with an adult employee.

One may legitimately ask whether programs of this kind can be implemented on a large scale and become part and parcel of most high school programs. NASSP took a survey in the spring of 1972 in three cities—the central city area of Portland, Oregon; the outskirts of metropolitan Washington, D.C.; and Sheboygan County, Wisconsin—to find out how many jobs could be filled by 15- to 20-year-olds. Schools, hospitals, day-care centers, and local agencies were found to have hundreds of potential job openings for young people. Investigation was made in order to discover why more of these positions were not actually open. As it turned out, both high schools and community employers had reservations.

More jobs would open up, the study indicated, if the high schools knew more about how educational goals can be attained through experience, and could work out with the agencies and companies a system of combined classroom learning and experience. From the point of view of the agencies and companies, more jobs would open up if the schools (or another agency) could cover transportation, insurance, and supervision costs; and if they could train the students in advance to meet entry-level skill specifications.

The schools must evaluate . . . to make sure that the industries are serving the needs of the student, and not simply their own interests.

The question of accountability. What about evaluation of career education programs? Who should be ultimately accountable for student performance when both schools and industries are cooperating in a common effort? Where training involves apprenticeship, should the industries be able to teach the students precisely whatever and however they please? Should the schools cease all interference in career training, and allow it truly to emerge into the community?

If schools and industries, businesses, and companies are to cooperate effectively, two things must happen:

- Before the testing of any career education pilot project—especially one which is to receive academic credit—both high schools and industries must collaborate closely to establish *what* is to be taught, by *whom*, using *what methods*, toward what *specific goal*, and by whom and how *evaluation* should be carried out.
- The schools must remain accountable for student performance and responsible for the viability of the program *as long as the student is still enrolled in the high school.*

Congressman William Steiger of Wisconsin in his "Educational Issues before the 93rd Congress" listed several guidelines* for the responsible implementation of career education programs—two of which are quite pertinent.

First, he suggested that some special training and instruction must be given to those who will supervise the work experiences of high school students, as most employers and company employees are not trained educators and need to be reoriented toward their new roles. Secondly, he suggested that the schools must remain accountable for student performance, employer performance, and for the general success of the program. The schools must evaluate whatever training for academic credit industries provide to make sure that the industries are serving the needs of the student, and not simply their own interests.

*See NASSP's *Conference Report on American Youth in the Mid-Seventies*, a publication of the papers presented during the conference, Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 1972.

Should some industries and agencies find that manpower, funds, and business interests make it unfeasible to assume the students' interests alongside their own, they have a right (and, indeed, an obligation) to inform the schools at the outset. After all, industries and businesses have their own tasks to perform, and these tasks are quite different from those assumed by public education. Public education must provide quality instruction to students for the students' sake. An industry must find qualified, instructed employees and use them for its own sake.

The practical and the intellectual: what is the optimal mix? But what must the high school do to maintain its own integrity? The schools themselves—through the collaboration of school boards, school administrators, counselors, and teachers—must set about the difficult task of defining the precise nature of their responsibility to their students. They must decide what kinds of instruction must and can reasonably be expected to fall within the high school's jurisdiction. And they must decide on the best methods for imparting quality instruction.

Their task, then, consists of two main parts:

- Determining what basic skills need to be mastered by *all* students, regardless of interest or postgraduate aims, and under what conditions an individual student can be said to have mastered those basic skills.
- Determining the best possible method for maintaining quality education while serving diverse student interests and aims.

More and more high schools are beginning to endorse the equivalency exam as a substitute for the high school program. If a student entering high school can demonstrate on an equivalency exam that he has already mastered those minimum basic skills required by the school, he should be able to acquire an equivalency diploma then and there and circumvent the entire program—especially if he wants to embark on a specific career-training program or go to work immediately.

BRIDGING THE GAP TO COLLEGE

BESIDES traditional Advanced Placement courses, many high schools now offer seniors the possibility of taking college courses for high school and college credit while still in high school.

In another program, high school seniors can have their cake and eat it too. They can be enrolled as freshmen in a nearby university without leaving their own school building. Long Island University's 31

FATS Program (Faculty for Accelerating Talented Students), created in 1972 and run by the C. W. Post Center, enables high school seniors to earn first-year college credit by receiving instruction at the high school from C. W. Post faculty. A student having successfully completed the first year is automatically considered a college sophomore.

The courses themselves are bona fide college courses, but they are worked out jointly by the C. W. Post faculty and the high school's faculty, to avoid twelfth grade-freshman year duplication and to pitch them at a level appropriate to the students' level of preparation.

Syracuse University's Center for Instructional Development has a program called Project Advance for high school seniors who have already completed their high school graduation requirements. These seniors can take courses for college credit in such subjects as communications, drugs, English, human values, and psychology. The courses are individualized, and are taught by Syracuse University-trained faculty right in the high schools.

More and more high schools are beginning to endorse the equivalency exam as a substitute for the high school program.

Simon's Rock College in Great Barrington, Mass., boasts a unique program. Instead of admitting students who have completed the normal three-year high school program, it takes students who have completed the tenth grade and makes them freshmen. Hence, it serves a 16- to 20-year-old age group. Because the legal definitions of a college education usually specify "four years *after* high school," Simon's Rock is only permitted to grant an AA degree. It has discovered that many 16-year-olds can do college work if they are mature and reasonably bright. Careful initial interviews are held, however, to make sure that the student will be able to adjust—academically and socially—to college life.

New York State's Time-Shortened Degree Experiment is one of the country's foremost pilot projects attempting to condense the high school-college experience and make it more meaningful and challenging. The Carnegie Corporation has devoted $533,440 since 1971 to a time-shortened program involving several of New York State's colleges and their nearby high schools.

Under the auspices of this program, the State University at Albany has created an inter-disciplinary social science program called "Man and His Institutions." A "bridge year" has been created for students having completed their junior year in high school, which combines the remaining high school requirements with introductory college-level courses. Students successfully completing the first year are awarded high school diplomas and automatically considered college sophomores.

Another proposed by the State University of New York bridges the gap between the two types of institutions even more successfully. The objectives of this new model are:

1. To lessen the distinction between advanced academic work taught in high schools and lower division collegiate instruction.
2. To provide faculties of a secondary school, a community college, and a four-year college opportunities to become well acquainted with each other, with the instruction being offered in each institutions.
3. To encourage faculties to be concerned about and involved in the instructional effort being performed at all three types of institutions.
4. To offer time-shortening options to students whose educational interests and academic aptitudes do not lie in the direction of a four-year liberal arts college.

Experiments like the New York State Time-Shortened Degree Experiments, Syracuse's Project Advance, Long Island University's FATS program, and Simon's Rock College, will pave the way to the eventual elimination of many of the needless rigidities and anachronisms presently separating the worlds of high school and college. Present structures will give way to more flexible, cooperative arrangements which will enhance the student's educational experience in both these institutions and permit him to take full advantage of both in an unbroken process of continuing education.

Breaking the Lockstep

The Ford Foundation and the U.S. Office of Education have provided funds to investigate an alternative to the traditional high school diploma in New York state.* Educational leaders in central New York have worked with members of the State Education Department under the coordination of the Syracuse University Research Corporation Policy Institute to develop an arrangement whereby any state resident can complete the necessary requirements for high school certification outside the traditional "lock-step" high school program—indeed, outside the high school itself!

The Regents External High School Diploma would permit any New York state citizen—be he a turned-off twelfth grader, an unemployed dropout, a military veteran, or a bored housewife—to consult a school-related but independent Regional Learning Service, which would help him structure an individualized learning program for completing the requirements needed for high school certification. This would permit a dropout, for example, to complete the necessary requirements in an environment completely unrelated to that of his old school, but one which would offer skills intrinsically equivalent to those taught in local high schools.

The new diploma would humanize, individualize, and loosen up the present high school certification process so that learners with

*See NASSP's *Alternative Paths to the High School Diploma*, published in 1973, for a complete discussion of this program.

different backgrounds, ages, and needs will not be forced to tread the same path.

What is so vital, so important about the External Diploma idea? What new dimensions does it add to public education options which have not existed in the past? And, specifically, what does it have to do with our twelfth-grade problems?

In adding the dimension of flexibility and individualization which permits intermittent exit and return to the educational system over a period of years in a continuing process, it has *everything* to do with our twelfth-grade problem. Not only does such an arrangement permit bored twelfth graders to evade the clutches of an experience that has grown tiresome, unchallenging, and undirected, but it also permits those outside the school system lacking a high school diploma to obtain one *without* having to face the intellectually and spiritually deadening (and perhaps humiliating) experience of returning to the twelfth grade.

Solving the problems of the twelfth grade will not be accomplished simply by reshuffling senior-year schedules and requirements.

Far-ranging proposals such as this, which affect the entire gamut of public educational experience, should reinforce the fact that the twelfth-grade problems we have investigated in this book do not operate in a vacuum. They cannot be solved without recourse both to those influential stages preceding and leading up to it and those passing beyond it into the post-graduate world. Solving the problems of the twelfth grade will not be accomplished simply by reshuffling senior-year schedules and requirements. The entire educational system must question its most basic assumptions if it is to emerge from the restrictive lockstep it has created.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

THE purpose of this monograph has been twofold: first, to investigate some of the causes for senior unrest, and, secondly, to suggest workable alternatives.

This study recognizes that not all high schools are financially or administratively able to dispense entirely with their traditional structures. While major restructuring is being tested in some high school districts with the formation of alternative schools and such all-encompassing experiments as the New York State Regents External High School Diploma, promising programs are also being developed within traditional high school programs. Although some innovators believe that it is a "cop-out" to retain the same basic high school structure and simply "tack on" a few progressive programs, it is not necessary that all change need be or *should* be sudden, complete, and all-encompassing.

There are many reasons for retaining programs like the Alternative Learning Program and the Executive High School Internships.

- Not many high schools can afford—financially or otherwise—to scrap the entire existing structure and begin anew.
- Sudden and complete change can be dangerous, because it risks "throwing out the baby with the bath," or rejecting those particular elements or aspects of traditional high school education which *were* valuable and might have served as guidelines to new programs. It can lead to such absurdities as, for example, the complete rejection of all academic requirements and the adoption of a "relevant" high school program based completely upon the haphazard learning acquired from field trips and unsupervised employment.
- Sudden change is also unfeasible socially. Few communities, parents, and school boards would support the complete and sudden dissolution of traditional structures.
- Innovative programs—if begun within a traditional structure and on a small scale—will be less likely to incur the unmanageable financial losses and massive student and faculty disillusionment that larger-scale and more radical programs might incur *if* handled unwisely. Small pilot projects such as the Alternative Learning Program—involving only 120 students at the outset—can be expended further if they succeed, but won't rupture the existing system if they fail.

- Introducing innovative programs within a traditional structure allows for the inclusion of a sometimes necessary transition period, so that students can slowly be "weaned away" from traditional study habits, such as the unquestioning acceptance of textbook material and teacher opinions.
- Progress in even a small intra-school program can positively affect the rest of that program. It was found that seniors participating in a part-time internship program became so enthusiastic and highly motivated in that program that it actually enhanced their performance in their ordinary classes, even though *these* had not changed in structure.
- A successful intra-school program can serve as a model for programs in other nearby schools and stimulate them to experiment.
- A program need not serve every type of high school student or even every type of twelfth grader in order to be valuable and worthwhile. As Part Two of this study should have demonstrated, the twelfth-grade "problem" is far too complex and wide-ranging to permit any general or all-encompassing solutions. By concentrating their efforts in one or two major areas of concern at the twelfth-grade level, many of the progressive high schools we've cited were able to create tight, economical, and highly effective programs which could serve as models for programs in other areas of concern for any high school with a different array of problems.

Small and large high schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas are equally capable of producing imaginative and workable programs.

Many exciting and promising new programs are being developed in high schools all across the country. No state, city, or region of the nation can boast a monopoly on innovation. Furthermore, school size, wealth, and location do not necessarily make a decisive difference in that school's innovative potential. Small and large high schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas are equally capable of producing imaginative and workable programs. And, whereas wealth may often be a deciding factor, the schools in Unity, Me., shortening their week to four days, for the benefit of both students and faculty, prove that valuable change can be spurred even by a tight budget!

What does seem to make the most difference in determining the success or failure of individual programs is the dedication and wise, solid planning of those staff members directly involved. The director of the Alternative Learning Program didn't hesitate to offer his opinion on the "exportability" of new ideas:

New ideas just can't be packaged up, exported, and guaranteed to work someplace else. It's tragic when someone invents a new con-

cept and everyone adopts it as if it will automatically work for everyone else.

One high school principal questioned the value of "new methods" in solving old problems:

> We're used to introducing 'new methods' as the answer to all our problems, and there is not always an improvement. It isn't the method that counts most, but how effective the organization and personal implementation is. So much depends on the individual teacher.

The degree of exportability of "ready-made" solutions should therefore be questioned by every school administrator thinking of adopting new programs. As most administrators know, no concept, however brilliant, is above its practical implementation. Staff dedication, staff-student ratios, careful organization, and ensured accountability will decide whether the most brilliant and original idea will stand or fall.

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